

The Oakland REACH

"If you give parents the best, they will start expecting the best."

Parent Power Playbook



Overview: A New Playbook for Educational Equity

Before COVID 19, less than 30% of Black and Brown students in Oakland were reading on grade level. When the pandemic hit, The Oakland REACH knew our families stood to be the hardest hit – and we refused to let that happen. Our response was fierce: After listening to families, we created the Virtual Family Hub, a potent mix of high-quality academic programming for K–8 students, deep relationships with families, and enrichments typically reserved for privileged white families. It delivered real gains: **60% of students in REACH's literacy programming moved 2+ levels on the district's assessment, 30% moved 3+ levels.**

In the process of creating the Hub, we created a whole new playbook. It's not just for the system, it's for all the people in and around it. We created this playbook so we can hold our organization accountable to our families, and hold Oakland accountable to solutions that work. We also believe that more communities across the country can learn from our playbook, replicate our model, and drive outcomes more quickly.

This won't be the first time a national movement for liberation originated from Oakland!

Our Core Belief:

When schools closed during COVID 19, we saw an opportunity. We asked: **"How do we use this moment as a chance for our families to get the same educational privilege as white families?"** That question formed our core belief: **If you give parents the best – if you expose them to privilege – they will start expecting the best.**

Our Hub allows families to finally choose and access privilege that white families expect, but Black and Brown families have always had to fight for. And now that our families have seen what is possible for their kids, they can't – and won't – unsee it. **As our team likes to say, "once our families experience a Porterhouse steak, they definitely aren't going back to the bread crumbs."**

Who We Are:

Our team is the *mamas, tias, grandmamas, papas* and the fathers who the system has failed – and who refuse to have that same reality for our children and grandchildren.

For generations, our families have not been at the table. We haven't been invited – and worse, we've been ignored when we try to pull up a chair. We've been asked to wait... and then wait some more... for the educational system to improve. Whether it's reforms in reading instruction or slow district changes, the result is always the same: generations of our people relegated to poverty. Enough!

We started with a small group half a decade ago, and grew into a national voice demanding radical change. **We show what is possible when parents lead.** Our learning communities are designed by and for families, who become the leaders and educators. **That makes our work not only innovative, but revolutionary.**



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Our Parent Power Playbook

Since our founding, our team has poured our lives and career experiences into different levers to advocate for quality and make the powerless parent powerful. We established an impressive track record: we've graduated 450 parents from our fellowship program, and mobilized hundreds more. We passed legislation to fight for priority enrollment. We built a citywide literacy coalition with 30+ partner organizations.

These were important wins for our families. But in such a politicized environment, we have seen policy wins turn into implementation fails. **That's when we realized we needed to step away from the playbook we were given, and build an entirely new one.** We don't believe the way we've been doing business is ever going to get us to high-quality instruction. So we set out to solve the problem. And, that's why, out of everything, the Hub has been the most successful advocacy tool in moving the needle toward quality.

Here's why it works:

1 PARENT POWER, not parent engagement:

The people closest to the problems are the ones solving them. Don't just invite them to a roundtable and check the box on parent engagement. Deeply invest in their growth and leadership.

- **What the change looks like:** Paid fellowship opportunities for our families to become experts in issues most plaguing their families, like literacy and special education, and then drive advocacy to make change. Regularly responding to family surveys as we grow the Hub — adding outdoor activities, high school programming, and more Family Liaisons.

2 BUILDING SOLUTIONS, not just adopting resolutions:

Stop talking about what's wrong, and start identifying opportunities and creating solutions. At The Oakland REACH, we call ourselves the opportunity people — we don't walk into a room and talk about the need to do something, we take a spot at the head of the table and say, DO THIS!

- **What the change looks like:** We joined with other families and the Community Coalition of Los Angeles to file a lawsuit in Superior Court against the State of California demanding the system listen to parents, and scale up solutions like our Hub to reach more kids. This lawsuit is about demanding a system that does right by Black and Brown kids — whether that learning is in person or remote.

3 FARM TO TABLE is the only way to go:

Parents know what they and their kids need, so we offer high-impact instruction and workshops that go directly from providers to families. We only serve up quality ingredients with a fast turnaround.

- **What the change looks like:** Almost 90% of our families shared that they wanted high-quality instruction that also celebrated their identity. We heard them, and grew our partnerships by 5x over the last year with largely Black and Brown led organizations. As a result, we've more than doubled the number of students enrolled in our Hub.

4 BURDEN THE SYSTEM, not the families:

The system taught us to advocate against it, so we hustled to attend every board meeting, go door to door, and write letters — all exhausting our parents and resulting in minor or no change.

- **What the change looks like:** Proving our Hub is effective, then growing it through a partnership with Oakland Unified School District on 6 pilot campuses, getting the system to replicate our solution to reach more families. Instead of spending time asking for quality in board meetings waiting for something better, our families wake up each morning to the best.

5 LASTING CHANGE IS LED BY FAMILIES, but there must be collective responsibility:

Our Hub exists because there is a big problem in our education system. But removing barriers cannot always be the sole responsibility of families. Our goal should be to do powerful work, but then pass the torch to local and national leaders. If we're doing this right, we should work ourselves out of a job.

- If we still need a Hub a decade from now because Black and Brown kids in our schools still aren't being taught to read, we haven't succeeded. The values of our Hub should become built into the system, so that our schools are no longer designed to fail us. That's the only way this work is sustainable and lasting.

